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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000042

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/11/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: TBILISI ELECTIONS UPDATE 01/11/2008

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On January 9, the Central Election Commission (CEC) announced preliminary results of Georgia's Presidential election. Mikheil Saakashvili won 52.21 percent. The nearest challenger, Levan Gachechiladze had 25.26 percent. On January 11, Irina Sarishvili, presidential candidate and leader of the opposition party Imedi (Hope), called on Ambassador Tefft. They discussed the election results and NATO. Labor party chairman and presidential candidate, Shalva Natelashvili, met us separately and asked for Embassy assistance in arranging meetings for a trip to Washington, D.C. on January 25. The Ambassador advised both leaders that the Embassy believes ODIHR, ISFED, and other international observers' assessments of the elections are credible. He said we are still waiting for answers from the CEC regarding Embassy observers' concerns. United National Council of Opposition (UNC) members Kakha Kukava and Tina Khidasheli spoke live on the Georgian Public Broadcaster on January 10. Kukava angrily denounced the CEC. He also presented sealed envelopes and ballots which he claimed were thrown in the trash by the CEC without being counted. Gachechiladze and the UNC have called for a public protest on January 13, the day by which the final results of the election must be announced. End Summary.

CEC Announces Preliminary Results

¶2. (U) On January 9, the Central Election Commission (CEC) announced preliminary results of Georgia's Presidential election. Mikheil Saakashvili was leading with 52.21 percent. His nearest challenger, Levan Gachechiladze had 25.26 percent. On January 11, the CEC's website was showing Saakashvili with 53.38 percent of the vote.

Sarishvili and Natelashvili Meet Ambassador

¶3. (C) On January 11, presidential candidate Irina Sarishvili called on Ambassador Tefft. Sarishvili expressed concern regarding the results and conduct of the election. The Ambassador told her the Embassy believes ODIHR, ISFED, and other international observers' assessments of the elections are credible. He said the parallel vote tabulations by ISFED met the highest standards. He said no international observers have been able to identify systemic fraud in the election. Furthermore, no opposition parties have yet produced concrete evidence of systemic fraud. Sarishvili also said she is concerned that Georgian membership in NATO could provoke a Russian backlash. She said NATO bases in Georgia would only increase Russian pressure on Georgia and aggravate the issue of the separatist regions. The Ambassador explicitly stated that USG policy has been consistent for years. There are no plans for NATO bases in Georgia.

14. (C) In a separate meeting, the Ambassador told Natelashvili the USG's position on the election. He told both leaders that the Embassy is waiting for answers from the CEC to questions about the conduct of the elections. Natelashvili thanked the Ambassador for, as he sees it, helping ensure his personal security prior to the election. With an eye toward the coming Parliamentary elections, he then asked for help in arranging meetings for a planned trip to Washington, D.C. on January 25. The Ambassador advised that we will contact the Desk for assistance.

Opposition Lashes Out on Live TV, Plans Protests

15. (U) The Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) finally agreed to give the UNC access to live airtime on January 10. UNC representatives Kakha Kukava and Tina Khidasheli denounced the CEC for ignoring election violations. He presented sealed envelopes with ballots inside. He claimed these ballots (from a Batumi precinct) were dumped in the trash without being opened and counted. Kukava also criticized the international observers for only reporting the positive aspects of the election. He said the opposition will start a "wave of protests" unless a re-count is ordered. In a separate interview, UNC candidate Levan Gachechiladze demanded a second round of elections and called for his supporters to gather in protest on January 13 at Republican Square in Tbilisi.

Comment

16. (C) Poloffs have not yet received a response from the CEC

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regarding questions that we delivered on January 9. We are waiting for a response before making a final decision as to what position to take on the fairness of the January 5 election.

TEFFT